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The Ancestral Trail

Cyber Challenge in the Next Dimension

27 Tengam, Gravity Defier

Clash of Metal with a Cyber Warrior

Julek Heller

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In the twenty-seventh sector

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Everything was blurred for a moment, as the burning sensation in Richard's eyes cleared. He breathed a sigh of relief. It was all over. At last he was back in the safety of his own world. Then he opened his eyes and looked around. Wherever he was, it was not home.

Richard stared in horror at the alien landscape before him. Everything about it was strange. All signs of life had vanished. The ground itself looked dead. Cracks zigzagged across its surface and acrid pools of hissing liquid gave off foul-smelling fumes. Richard stared in one direction, then another. Nothing looked right.

Yet amid the strangeness there were oddly familiar touches. For a moment he was baffled. Then he realized where he was. It was the Ancestral City, but in another time-zone. Somehow, Richard had been transported into the future!

Richard looked towards the ashen sky and shook his head in bewilderment. The Tree of Life may have vanished, but he was sure that he was standing on the very spot where he had just been talking to Golan.

Then Richard realized that he was still wearing the suit of armour he had been given by Ronek. Like everything else it too had changed. His sword was still hanging from his waist, and dangling from a chain around his neck was the amulet which Richard was sure he had returned to Golan. The only thing that was missing was his helmet.

Desolate land

Richard covered his eyes in dismay, but his depression was only momentary. He remembered the last line of the final riddle in Melek's *Book of Prophecies*, "All is still not what it seems."

"Well," Richard muttered to himself, "it only seems there's no way out because I haven't looked for one."

Carefully avoiding the many steaming pools of stagnant liquid, Richard started walking and began to pick out further traces of the Ancestral City. A ring of broken, charred stones marked the central citadel. Tortuous gullies mapped the maze-like network of streets. Two towering pillars, cracked and eroded, were all that remained of the main gates. Beyond them stretched the petrified remnants of the rolling plain where Golan's forces had fought and won the Final Battle.

For a moment, Richard experienced a sense of longing for the old Ancestral World. Anything would be better than this desolate, decaying terrain.

An old friend

It was then that Richard spied faint movement in the distance. It was a figure moving slowly towards him on the plain ahead. He stood his ground, not knowing what to expect. To his delight, Richard recognized the figure as Broon, leader of the Common Beasts, whose life he had once saved. A smile spread across his face. He hurried forward to greet his old friend and ally. Perhaps Broon could provide the answers to the questions that had been racing through his mind since his arrival in this strange new world.

Suddenly, there was a blinding flash followed by a loud blast and Broon was bathed in a blanket of raw energy.

Startled, Richard turned to face the source of the blast and was amazed to see a silver-coloured robot heading towards Broon. It was only slightly smaller in height than Richard and had two hydraulic arms, which waved about as it hovered above the ground. A beam of intense white light shot out from one of the two circular lenses in the middle of the robot's head. It struck the hapless Broon in the chest and he let out a howl of pain.

Taken unawares, Broon was an easy target as the robot aimed another beam of white light towards him. It was impossible to miss at such close range. The bolt hit Broon's torso and scattered in lines of vicious sparks over his whole body. Richard watched helplessly as his friend writhed in agony.

Then something even more unexpected occurred. Broon's skin peeled away to reveal a robotic metal body.

Lights blinked and spluttered, wires blackened and snapped, fountaining geysers of sparks into the air. He jerked and twisted uncontrollably until, with a sudden spasm, Broon's back snapped and he lay motionless on the ground.

Richard stood in shock as the silver robot turned its attention to him.

"I am Robo," it said in a high-pitched monotone voice. "Data banks identify you as Richard, the Chosen One."

"Yes... yes, that's my name," Richard said, nervously eyeing the newcomer's deadly death-ray lens.

FRIEND OR FOE?

"Carbon-based organisms cannot survive in this world," Robo said. "I will help you to escape."

"Help me," Richard snapped. "You just killed my friend!"

"Negative," Robo stated. "Terminated subject was not Broon. Robotic form was preparing to attack Richard."

Richard surveyed the burned out carcass that once was Broon and immediately spotted something that bore out Robo's story. At the end of Broon's right hand were the shattered remnants of what could only have been a futuristic gun.

It was a gun unlike any that Richard had ever seen before but its shape was unmistakable. It had been held in the hand that Broon had been waving at Richard. The wave had not been one of friendly recognition. It had been a gesture that was meant to bring death.

"You have entered the Cyber Dimension," Robo's shrill voice interrupted Richard's thoughts.

"Cyber Dimension," Richard gasped. "What do you mean?"

There was a faint whirring sound as motors and micro-processors sprang into action somewhere deep inside Robo.

"Cyber Dimension is multi-dimensional sub-version of place called Ancestral World," came the answer. "It exists on a separate digital plane and comprises violent protoplasmic distortions of the source dimension constituents."

"What do you mean?" Richard asked.

"In simple terms, this is and is not the Ancestral World."

New dimension

Richard's mind went blank. He had no idea what he was doing here or how he got here. Then it came to him. He fingered the amulet that hung around his neck.

"It must be something to do with this," he exclaimed. "I was about to give the amulet to Golan when there was a bright flash. Then I was here."

"Dimensional transfer malfunction," Robo confirmed. "Amulet should have been released before matter transport was engaged. You have been incorrectly transported to the Cyber Dimension."

"How do I get back to my world?" Richard asked.

Whirring sounds came from within Robo as his circuits sought an answer.

"Only possible when amulet is in the possession of Evil One," Robo said finally.

It was a statement that sent Richard's senses reeling.

"I thought the Evil One was dead," Richard said. "How can I return the amulet to him?"

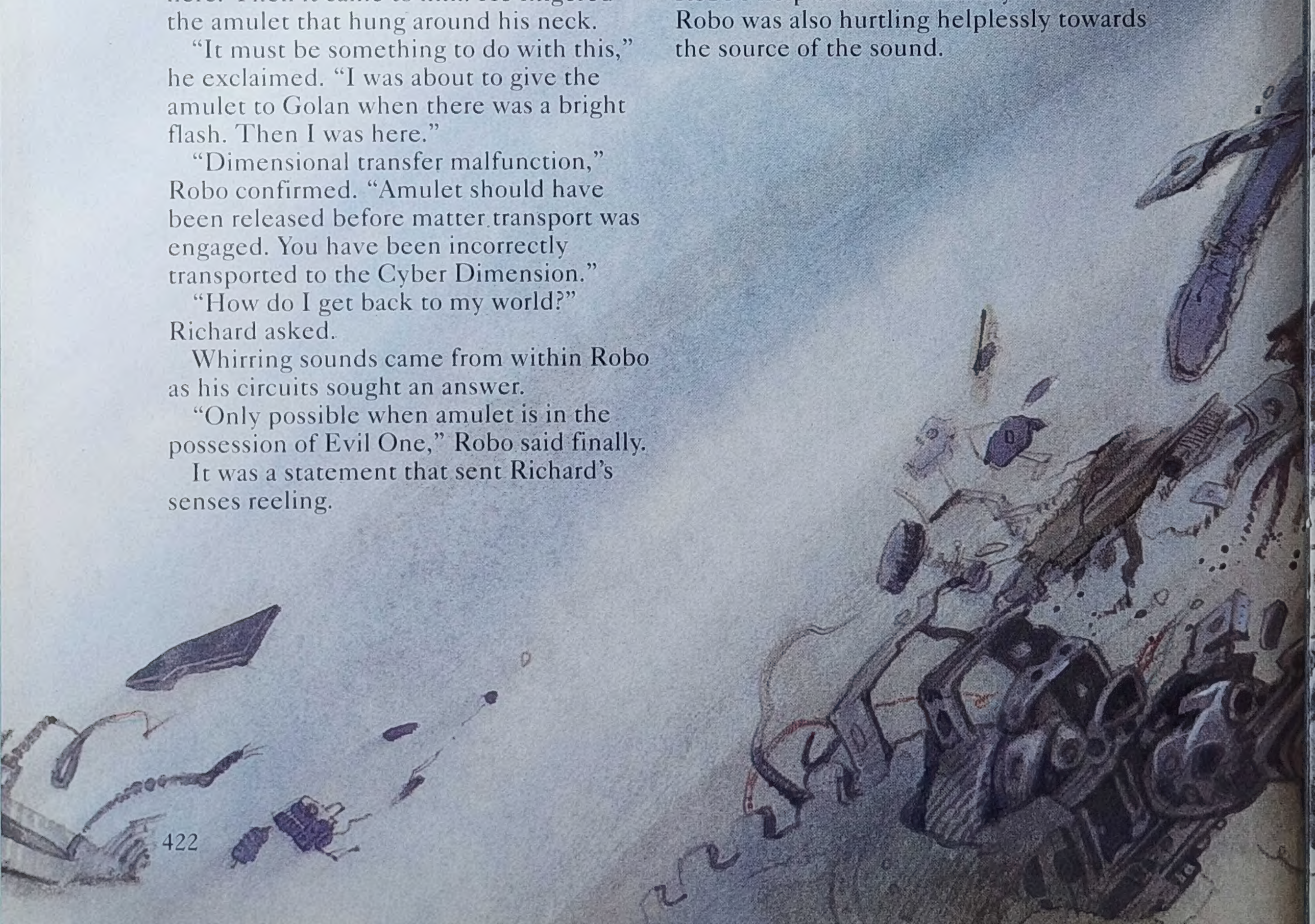
"Negative," Robo said. "Evil One still alive. Check Robo's chest panel."

Richard moved closer to the robot and noticed a screen displaying a series of apparently random 1s and 0s. He studied the markings but could make no sense of them at all. Then he realized.

"It's binary!" Richard exclaimed. "Let's see if I can work it out."

Slowly, he began to decode the binary data. It was not easy but after a while he made out the semblance of a phrase.

Before he had the chance to ponder the words, Richard heard an ominous rumbling noise coming from somewhere behind him. As he turned towards the sound he was swept violently off his feet and thrown through the air. He called for Robo's help but it was already too late. Robo was also hurtling helplessly towards the source of the sound.



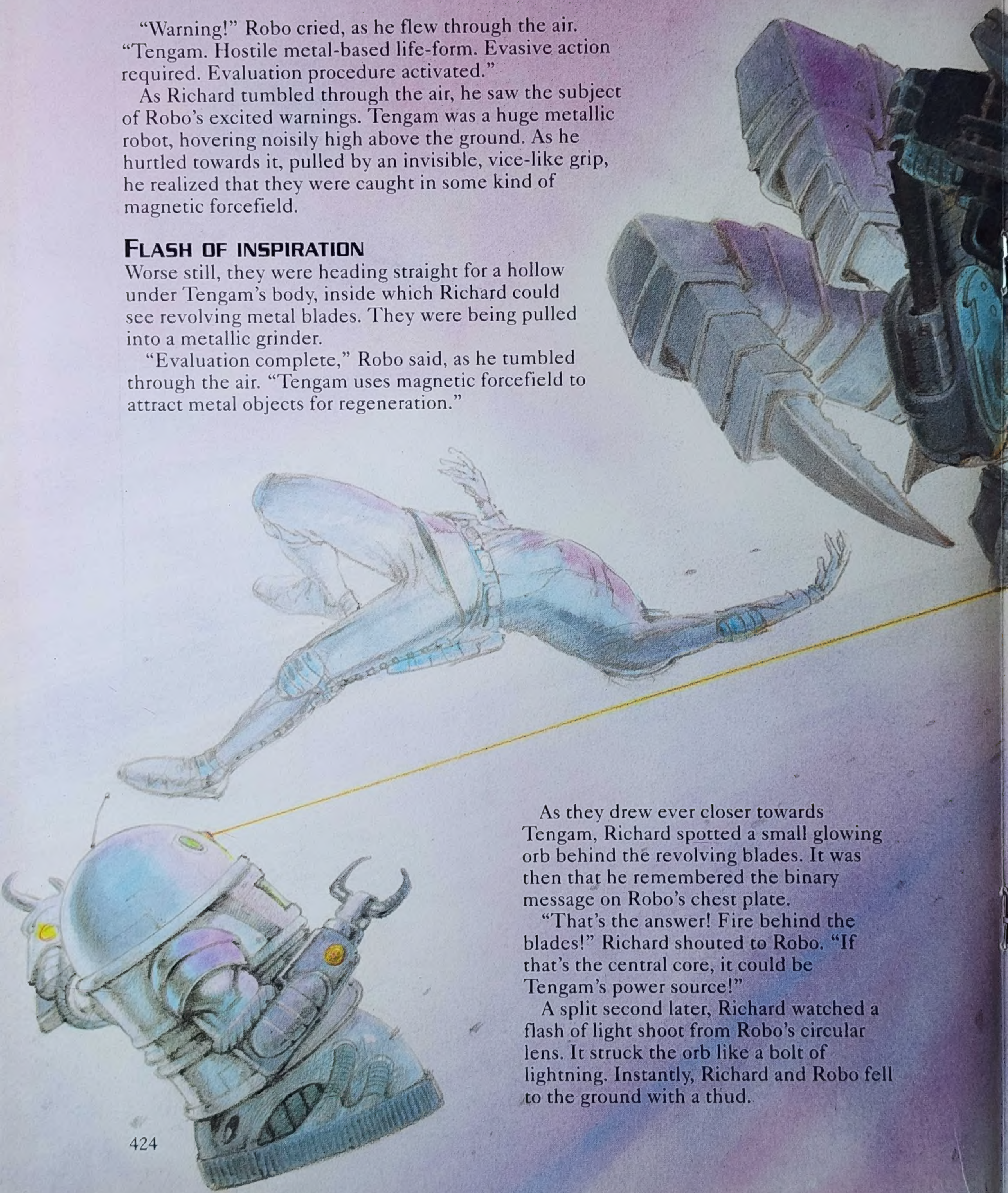
"Warning!" Robo cried, as he flew through the air. "Tengam. Hostile metal-based life-form. Evasive action required. Evaluation procedure activated."

As Richard tumbled through the air, he saw the subject of Robo's excited warnings. Tengam was a huge metallic robot, hovering noisily high above the ground. As he hurtled towards it, pulled by an invisible, vice-like grip, he realized that they were caught in some kind of magnetic forcefield.

Flash of inspiration

Worse still, they were heading straight for a hollow under Tengam's body, inside which Richard could see revolving metal blades. They were being pulled into a metallic grinder.

"Evaluation complete," Robo said, as he tumbled through the air. "Tengam uses magnetic forcefield to attract metal objects for regeneration."



As they drew ever closer towards Tengam, Richard spotted a small glowing orb behind the revolving blades. It was then that he remembered the binary message on Robo's chest plate.

"That's the answer! Fire behind the blades!" Richard shouted to Robo. "If that's the central core, it could be Tengam's power source!"

A split second later, Richard watched a flash of light shoot from Robo's circular lens. It struck the orb like a bolt of lightning. Instantly, Richard and Robo fell to the ground with a thud.

Relieved, Richard pulled himself to his feet. It had worked, the gravity-defier was now sitting harmlessly on the ground, its power destroyed.

"Forcefield neutralization temporary," Robo warned. "Unable to evaluate how long Tengam will remain dormant. Immediate evacuation of area necessary."

"Which way?" Richard asked.

"Follow me," Robo ordered, hovering above the ground and moving forward.

The two travelled in silence for what seemed an age. Richard was amazed by the incredible scope and variety of the landscape that surrounded them.

The flat plain where he had almost met his end at the hands of Tengam had been superseded by a terrain that Richard had never before seen. At first glance the ground appeared to be covered in broken slates of all shapes and sizes.

It was only when Richard began walking on the surface that he realized it was solid. The slates seemed to be welded tightly together. As he walked, Richard could hear the faint echo of his own footsteps, as

if the ground beneath him was hollow. Richard had been so lost in his thoughts that it was some time before he realized he was alone. He did not remember losing sight of Robo, but now he could see no sign of the robot.

Alone

There was a faint breeze in the sterile air as Richard pondered his plight. Without the robot's help, his task would be even more difficult. Richard knew he had no choice but to continue on his way and hope that Robo would come back.

Despite the hard-going, Richard could not help but wonder about Robo. Why had he left him alone like this? Was he really going to help him or was he simply leading him into the clutches of the Evil One?

In the distance, Richard saw a dark line appear on the horizon. He blinked in surprise – the line appeared to be moving towards him. Richard stood still for a while and squinted his eyes to make sure they were not deceiving him. He had been right. The line was getting closer.

Richard pondered what to do next. He had a strange feeling that whatever was heading his way was more likely to be hostile than friendly. He looked from side to side. He knew he could not go back and chance another encounter with Tengam, but should he go right or left? In the event the decision was made for him.

In the few seconds he had spent considering his predicament, the progress of the line had accelerated to such an extent that Richard was able to see it quite clearly. It appeared to be comprised of about twenty bullet-shaped objects that moved as one, leaping over the ground at high speed. Richard stood gazing in awe at the approaching spectacle. Then in the blink of an eye they were upon him. He was surrounded. There was no escape!

Richard gasped as the bullet-shaped line formed a tight circle around him. For a few moments, they did not move and Richard was able to inspect the strange objects more closely. They definitely appeared robotic, but Richard could not begin to imagine what their possible function might be.

Richard felt as if he was being scrutinized by the creatures. It was as if they wanted to learn everything about their prey before moving in for the kill.

Instinctively, Richard drew his sword and waved it before him at his tormentors. The bullet-shaped objects responded by moving slowly towards him. There was no way out. Having narrowly escaped being ground by metal blades he was about to be crushed to death by a living wall.

Close escape

Suddenly there was a blinding flash. Richard saw a break in the wall where several of the objects lay sprawled on the floor, their dull metallic casing melting into a silvery molten pool. The circle began to break up into individual units, which leaped away in giant strides before reforming again into a solid line and moving off as if nothing had happened.

Richard breathed a sigh of relief. Robo had returned just in time.

"Land Leapers," Robo explained in his robotic drone. "Individual units travel as one. Capable of crushing objects of vast proportions. Advise Richard avoid them."

Richard thanked the robot for his timely return and asked him where he had been.

"Follow me," Robo ordered, ignoring Richard's question. The two moved off briskly in the direction from which the Land Leapers had originally appeared.

After a while, Richard turned to the robot. "Why did you leave me back there?" he asked.

Robo said nothing as he moved away from the area, with Richard following closely behind. The robot was obviously not going to answer his question.

Once again, the terrain was changing its appearance. The only consistent features of the landscape were the pools of foul-smelling liquid that Richard was taking great care to avoid.

As they climbed a gentle slope, the ground ahead smoothed out. The jagged slates were all behind them now but the ground ahead looked even more bizarre. It had square-shaped pits in a regular, uniform pattern that stretched off far into the distance.

Acid attack

Richard and Robo travelled on in silence for a while. Then something strange happened. First they heard a high-pitched whistle, and then they were sprayed from the ground with an odd green liquid. It hit Robo on the front and then splashed on to Richard's right arm. Steam began to hiss from where the liquid had landed.

"Danger!" Robo warned. "Concentrated acid. Danger!" Richard looked at the robot in dismay and smelt the pungent odour of burning metal. The pair of them were melting away!

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Transformed by the Cyber Dimension, these two friendly little creatures are still hot on the heels of Richard. They are hidden somewhere in this issue. Use your powers of observation to spot them.

In issue 26, Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 404.

▶ Computer Challenge

Hidden somewhere in this issue is a vitally important computer component from the sinister Cyber Dimension. Use your visual skills to help Richard and his new friend Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?

▶ Life Force Pod

In issue 26, there were 26 pods hidden in the Guardians' armour and clothing.

▶ Monsters & Magic

In issue 26, the character of The Evil One was based on Merlin the magician.

▶ Techscan cards

Your *Techscan* Q & A cards present a unique insight into the scientific theories that govern the forces contained in the Cyber Dimension. Carefully cut out and collect them. In later issues we will tell you how they can be used instead of dice in the *Mainframe Control* game.

▶ Cyber Power cards

All the astounding creatures that Richard and Robo encounter during their adventures in the Cyber Dimension are featured in your *Cyber Power* cards. Carefully cut out and collect them. Rules to the game will be given in later issues.

▶ Binary Decoder

Use the *Binary Decoder* to discover the secret message displayed on Robo's chest plate. Unravelling this mystery will enable you to discover each adversary's particular weakness.

▶ Mainframe Control

A strategy game that is sure to give you hours of pleasure. Cut out the pieces and keep them safe. More will be given at regular intervals, along with a special playing board and the rules of the game.

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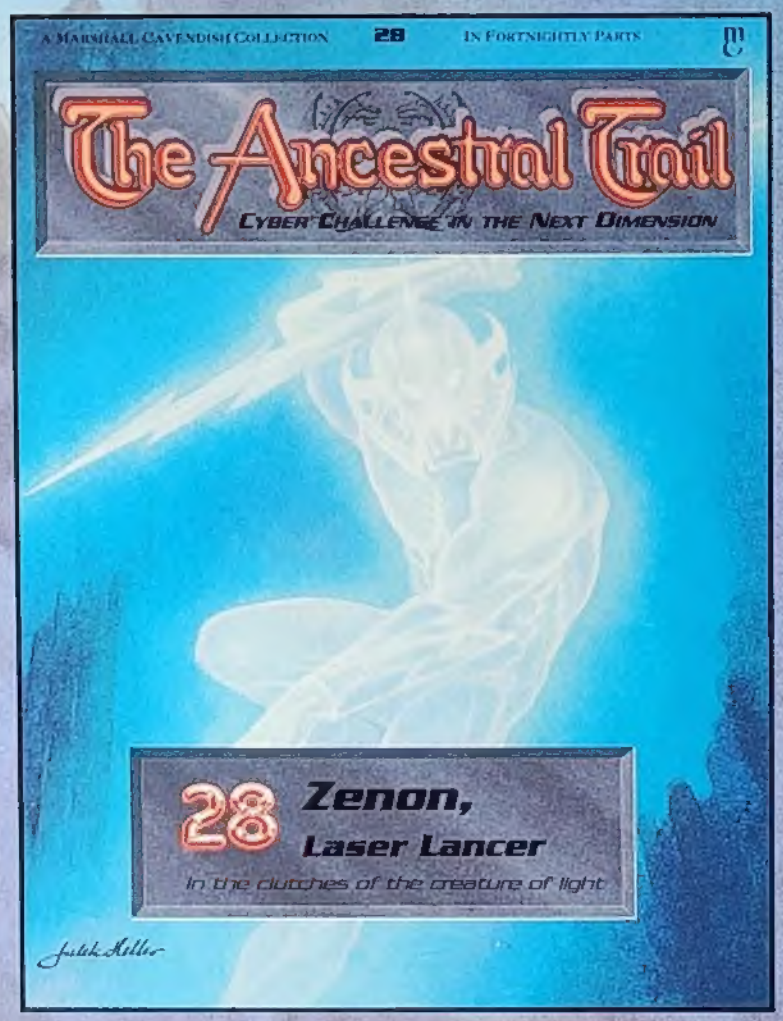

In Issue 28

Zenon, Laser Lancer

Richard and Robo encounter a foe that is composed of pure light. Can they evade the creature's deadly laser spears and find a way to overcome its awesome powers?

plus

- 2 Techscan cards
- 2 Cyber Power cards
- More playing pieces for Mainframe Control

Coming in Issue 29

Flector, High-Speed Solar Cruiser

Richard's adventures in the Cyber Dimension take to the skies as he meets an adversary that no power can overcome.

plus

- *Techscan cards* folder for you to make.

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